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ABSTRACT

This paper applies Cuban's (1992) concept of "managing dilemmas" to the current market-based reforms in English and Welsh education at both the macro (policy) and, particularly, at the micro (individual and school) levels. The Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) Study is currently investigating the interaction between parental choice and school decision making, in particular, how secondary schools respond to competition and how parents react to these responses. The 3-year case study, which began in 1993, is examining 3 different areas: an urban area in northern England, a town with a history of school competition, and a semirural area. Each of these areas resembles a "local competitive area," in which secondary schools draw from a common population of parents. This paper offers examples of strategic choice dilemmas drawn from three schools in the northern urban area. The examples suggest that dilemmas can be addressed through "striking a balance," through attempting to reconcile apparent opposites. Managing school effectiveness requires at least three delicate balancing acts, which involves seeking to reconcile: (1) the complex, fluid, and uncertain environment with the school's unique culture as a social institution; (2) strategic planning with daily problem-solving; and (3) creativity with accountability and discipline. The concept of "striking a balance" or "managing paradox" provides a rationale for including structured reflective approaches in management-development programs and suggests how indecisiveness at the school level can be avoided. Schools, however, should recognize the varying degrees of severity of different dilemma-filled situations, and not fall prey to simple solutions. Contains 40 references. (LMI)

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MANAGING DILEMMAS IN EDUCATION: THE TIGHTROPE WALK OF STRATEGIC CHOICE IN MORE AUTONOMOUS INSTITUTIONS

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1. Introduction

In this paper I take as my starting-point Cuban's (1992) reflection on managing dilemmas in his penetrating and provocative 1991 AERA Annual Meeting presidential address. These ideas provided the stimulus for the Theme Discussion in the first IIP'94 Newsletter. They seem to mesh very well with my developing thinking over a long period about administrator preparation ('management development' to us!) and administrative practice (for example, Glatter, 1972, 1991), and also with on-going research which I am directing on the effects of recent market-based reforms in English education (1).

After a brief exploratory discussion of Cuban's ideas and some of their implications, I shall attempt to apply the notion of managing dilemmas to the current reforms in England and Wales, both at the macro (policy) level and, particularly, at the micro levels of schools and individuals.

2. Managing dilemmas: ideas and implications

Let me review briefly Cuban's basic argument. He distinguishes between 'problems' and 'dilemmas' (or 'predicaments'). The former are relatively routine, structured situations which can be overcome by the application of standard problem-solving approaches: he gives the examples of students failing to co-operate over getting classes to start on time and a researcher meeting obstacles in gaining access for a research study. Dilemmas are different (though whether only in degree or actually in kind is not quite clear) in that they are "conflict-filled situations that require choices because competing, highly prized values cannot be fully satisfied" which are "far messier, less structured and often intractable to routine solutions" (Cuban, 1992, p. 6). They involve balancing competing claims, striking bargains and making trade-offs between values in reaching decisions. "We invent a tightrope to walk, knowing that to cross the tightrope juggling the competing claims will still leave us uneasy" (ibid., p. 7).

Cuban acknowledges that the distinction is far from original. However, he makes at least two noteworthy points. First, he suggests that researchers often overlook the tension-ridden dilemmas that policy-makers and practitioners continually have to manage in their organizations. Second, in a 'can-do' culture which often generates a guilt-inducing "mirage of simple solutions" (ibid., p. 10), it is important to recognise that many situations do not lend themselves to clearly defined solutions. The best we can do is to reframe the dilemmas through explicit analysis and thus seek to "create better compromises and more elegant tightrope walks. Reframing and managing dilemmas are art forms, filled with doubt but at least free of corrosive guilt" (ibid., p. 8).

Holmes (1993) distinguishes between open-ended dilemmas, for example the allocation of a new resource, and closed dilemmas such as re-allocating an existing resource, maintaining that the former kind are much easier to tackle.

Cuban and others assume that managing dilemmas is an activity much concerned with making moral choices, and indeed Maclagan and Snell (1992) claim that their own research and that of others on managers outside education "demonstrates *the everyday nature of many moral dilemmas faced by managers*" [italics in original] (p. 166). However, we need to be clear what 'moral' includes in this context. Such dilemmas may have none of the clarity and certainty which the term often seems to imply. Handy (1994) makes the point sharply: "Most of the dilemmas which we face in this time of confusion are not the straightforward ones of choosing between right and wrong, where compromise would, indeed, be weakness, but the much more complicated dilemmas of right and right" (p. 83). He suggests further that most compromise is in any case not about our principles but about our interests (though the two may presumably overlap). The dilemmas we face may be analyzed and understood at least as well from a micropolitical (Bacharach and Mundell, 1993) as from a moral perspective.

Unfortunately, much of the discussion about values and ethics in educational management is at the level of abstraction and generalities. Writers on moral aspects rarely examine real situations of conflict and tension in which there are genuine dilemmas to confront, for example, decisions about the allocation of scarce resources or about the exclusion of disruptive pupils from school.

Some dilemmas of leadership appear to be perennial. In the personnel field, for example, dilemmas concerning the management of the under-performing or embittered teacher, the staffroom rebel, the arrogant disciplinarian and so on are the stuff of many case studies and role plays in educational management development. Other kinds of dilemma are broader and more pervasive, and are concerned with the connection between the organization and its environment (or in Bacharach and Mundell's (1993) terms, between micropolitics and macropolitics), which is a key focus of this paper. Drawing on the work of Hoyle (1975) and Hughes (1985) concerning leadership by education professionals, Busher and Saran (1994) characterize headteachers as confronting the dilemma "of two sets of potentially conflicting values. On the one hand, they act as managers taking decisions in the interests of the stakeholders of an organization, on the other, they support the values of their teacher colleagues which define good professional practice" (p. 11).

A particularly graphic description of leadership dilemmas is given by an unnamed superintendent in the transcript of a reflective interview published by Osterman and Kottkamp (1993). The superintendent is commenting on his leadership style in dealing with staff who will not go along with a particular course of action. He says that, in such instances, he used to take a confrontational line too often in the past, but has now modified his style.

> "I am sure there are people who would like to see the superintendent say, 'You, change or get out!' However, that can't be done... What you learn on the job is that there are no either/or's. There are degrees of either this or either that. [pause] I call it ambiguities. The ambiguities we deal with at work (which are probably the most important

elements in the long run for effectiveness) I now share with people - frequently - which I didn't do before. I take assessments more frequently of those ambiguities, unclear pathways" (pp. 168/9).

It is possible that these 'unclear pathways' and 'ambiguities' are relevant to the familiar distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris and Schon, 1974). Perhaps the discrepancies often noted between them in individual behaviour arise as much from the dilemmas, ambiguities and compromises intrinsically involved in the decision-making process as from other causes, such as weak or unclear basic values and convictions or conflicting theories-in-use. (Even so, as I suggest later, the doubts and compromises that led to a particular decision may often not be articulated, and perhaps not even recognised, once it has been taken).

A number of general points can be made at this stage. First, using the language of dilemmas and predicaments holds some dangers, even in cultures which are not as determinedly 'can-do' as Cuban considers the USA to be. This language carries the implication of paralysis, of leaders being constantly torn between alternatives, or 'dithering' (a word which has been effectively used recently as a term of abuse in the British political sphere). As Holmes (1993) has suggested, it is the task of leadership to confront dilemmas and ambiguities, not to let them fester and multiply. There is evidence that teachers value a decisive approach. From their large-scale study of new heads of secondary schools in England and Wales, which included collecting nearly 300 teachers' views on their preferred style of headship, Weindling and Earley (1987) concluded that "Most teachers wanted heads to be consultative and listen to the views of staff, but then make a clear decision. They disliked indecisiveness and slow decision-making" (pp. 175-6). This is likely to be the expectation of other stakeholders also. When we talk of the management of dilemmas we must not imply that practitioners should adopt the styles and time-frames of scholarship in reaching their conclusions!

Secondly, however, focusing on dilemmas and ambiguities has significance for management development/administrator preparation, particularly in contexts such a the UK where much stress is currently being placed on detailed frameworks of measurable and relatively mechanistic management competences (Esp, 1993). An intriguing study by Cave and Wilkinson (1992) based on in-depth work with a 'focus group' of educational leaders over an extended period concluded that, as well as specific areas of knowledge and skill, provision needs to be made for the development of 'higher order capacities' of which the following were identified from the study: 'reading the situation'; 'balanced judgement'; 'intuition' (based on experience and reflection); and 'political acumen'. Reed and Anthony (1992), writing from a general management perspective, also emphasize the limitations of technically oriented competence-based approaches and argue that managers must be helped "to cope with the contradictory pressures and conflicting priorities which they will inevitably confront as professionals working within, and to some extent dependent on, complex organizations" (P. 609).

This involves challenging an "unreflective pragmatism or 'hucksterism' poorly suited to the spirit and condition of the times" (p. 610).

Third, there is a need for those writing in this area, particularly (but not exclusively) from a moral or ethical standpoint, to examine actual situations where decisions are taken 'at the crunch', in which the reconciliation of conflicting pressures is attempted and priorities are determined, in order to relate these to their broader frameworks of analysis.

This preliminary general discussion has been intended to provide a backdrop to the following commentary on, and exemplification of, dilemmas and ambiguities in some aspects of the process of school reform, with particular reference to England and Wales.

3. Tensions in the reform environment

It is almost a truism that schools face a host of complex and often inconsistent pressures from their environments. These pressures interact with one another to produce even greater complexity and to make prediction at the 'micro' level of the school a hazardous and uncertain activity (Levin, 1993).

If this is an accurate assessment in relation to the contemporary scene in general, the recent espousal of radical reform strategies by governments in many countries has accentuated the uncertainties. The policies which have been adopted contain numerous tensions and contradictions. The paradox most frequently remarked upon is probably that between greater and less regulation: the simultaneous demands for more central control and checking for purposes of accountability, and for more devolution of authority, diversity and choice in the interests of autonomy (Guthrie *et al*, 1989).

Cooper (1991), a strong supporter of the contemporary reform movement in general, nevertheless draws attention to three dilemmas or 'cross-tensions' which he argues need to be understood and at least partially resolved if the process is to move forward. The first dilemma is how to provide high quality, equitable and appropriate education for all without creating an unresponsive state bureaucracy. The second relates to the possible effects on parental involvement of the weakening of the concept of the neighbourhood school within a geographic community:

> "Parents-as-consumers may be in conflict with parents-as-participants, since heightened choice may send children off to far away schools, distant from the neighbourhood, community and families with whom children grew up. Thus, a dilemma of school reform lies in the conflict between individual families' choice on the one hand and the need for concerted, community involvement in schools ('social capital') on the other" (p. 239).

Cooper goes on to suggest that 'schools of choice must be aware that as their catchment area grows, their natural and easy access to parents diminishes" (p. 248). The third dilemma is concerned with the increasing role of parents on

local school governing boards. How can they operate as both clients and formal decision-makers at the same time? Can they be both a 'provider' and a 'consumer'?

Shapira and Haymann (1991) also use the language of dilemmas in analyzing school reform policies, but they focus on competing values (pluralism vs. integration and excellence vs. equity) whereas Cooper's emphasis is more on management processes and role conflicts. The central point, however, is that these tensions and dilemmas do not remain locked in the wider system environment, but are reflected within individual schools and localities.

In analyzing the market-orientated reforms in Britain, Cole (1992) refers to what he sees as "the contradiction between the free market, consumerist approach to education and the authoritarian drive for social order [as reflected in the imposition of a National Curriculum]" (p. 141). Writing with reference to England and Wales, Simkins (1993) argues that the task facing schools is to reconcile *at least three different perspectives on effectiveness*:

(a) that of central government, with its clear mandatory requirements on curricula, testing and inspection and on the publication of information about examination results, truancy levels and other matters;

(b) that of parents - whose expectations are not monolithic and pose difficult choices for schools about which groups to seek to attract;

(c) that of staff working within schools, who will bring both professional and interest-group considerations to bear on their judgements.

There may be some overlap between the three sets of definitions of effectiveness, but Simkins suggests that they will often be contested and hence may not be easy to reconcile. This is a key task for school managers, working within a context in which the balance of power has recently been significantly changed in favour of the external stakeholders.

In making their responses within this contradictory, ambiguous and dynamic environment, schools (or those within them) must seek to reconcile the conflicting pressures. This is the subject of the next section.

4. Dilemmas of reform at the school level

Some consideration has been given to the respective contributions of environment and organization in determining responses (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1985). Greater significance has recently been attached to the importance of subjective perception and human agency in shaping events. In a powerful article, Daft and Weick (1984) stressed the complexity and importance of the process of interpretation:

> "Managers literally must wade into the ocean of events that surround the organization and actively try to make sense of them...

> Interpretation is the process of translating these events, of developing models for understanding, of bringing out meaning..." (p. 286).

Morgan (1986) goes so far as to suggest that organizations in effect create their own environments, and argues for the need to overcome the false impression that they are "reacting to a world that is independent of their own making". This would at least help them to understand "that they themselves often create the constraints, barriers and situations that cause them problems" (p. 137).

An illuminating recent review of the concepts and literature in this area argues for a balanced view of responsiveness:

> "Clearly, a simple response model, whether it sees schools as heroic actors or hapless victims, does not do justice to the complexity of the situation. Rather, we need to think in terms of a complex interplay between so-called external features, features of the school as an organization, and the specifics of a given time, place and group of people" (Levin, 1993, p. 15).

Levin looks at available research both within and outside education. On the whole, this shows organizational actors' limited capacity and/or willingness to understand, anticipate and adjust to change. Often they seem to take steps to change as little as possible, though they are not always successful in this endeavour. Of particular interest in view of our earlier discussion about schools' need to reconcile differing definitions of effectiveness is the suggestion that, since as public organizations they "are fundamentally subject to competing interests", they will exhibit "a pattern of response which stresses placating interests over achieving goals" (p. 13).

It might be argued that the new environments of radical reform have been designed precisely to change this situation, by forcing schools to respond effectively and to keep a clear focus on achieving goals (as defined by the architects of the reforms) rather than on placating interests. Thus, considerable stress is currently placed in England and Wales on the concepts of strategic and development planning (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; OFSTED, 1993; Weindling, 1993) in spite of the problems frequently identified with such approaches (Mintzberg, 1994; Wallace, 1992). As Levin (1993) suggests, "Organizations may face simultaneous pressures in quite opposite directions, so that it is not at all clear what strategy might be most effective" (p. 14).

Some schools in England and Wales have taken strategic 'positioning' decisions of a fairly dramatic kind since the new competitive market arrangements, in which funding is linked largely to the numbers and ages of pupils attending the school, were introduced. In particular, schools which 'opt out' of local education authority control and become grant-maintained can take quite wide ranging decisions about their future organization, usually subject to the approval of the Secretary of State. This might include lowering

the age of entry to the school, introducing a 'Sixth Form' in order to offer programmes to 16-19 year olds, teaching boys and girls separately for the first time and introducing selection tests for applicants. There are current examples of all of these. The motivation in all cases appears to be at least in part to obtain competitive advantage over nearby schools. Sometimes these 'pioneers' receive the bonus of national media coverage. Without research, however (which we plan to undertake in at least one of the above cases) we do not know what dilemmas were confronted in taking the potentially fateful decision nor what its outcomes will be in educational and marketing terms.

For our Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) study we are using both quantitative and qualitative methods to focus on the dynamics of parental choice and school response in three contrasting areas in different parts of England. (A brief outline of the study is included in the Appendix). Each of these areas resembles as closely as possible what we call a 'local competitive arena' in which secondary schools draw from a largely common population of parents. The factors affecting parental choice and school response can only, in our view, be adequately understood within the specific local context in which they operate and this includes the nature of the particular 'competitive environment' (Kotler and Fox, 1985) in the locality.

Indeed, our early findings suggest that schools are often more responsive to what competitor schools and feeder schools are doing than to any clear perception of 'consumer' expectations - there is little formal assessment of the latter by the schools in our case study areas (Woods *et al.*, 1994). Overall there appears to be considerably more evidence of responses of a purely *promotional* kind (concerned with publicity and image-enhancement) than on what we have called *substantive* change (concerned with the school's central educational activities and the way it organises itself). Moreover, where there is evidence of the latter it tends to be mostly in the direction of 'safe' or 'traditional' academic practice (such as examination performance, homework and setting by ability), apparently in the hope of attracting more middle class and academically able children. If these tendencies are confirmed they would support Levin's (1993) assessment that organizational responsiveness is something of a myth. However, our study is a longitudinal one and the jury is still out. The projected loosening of the hitherto highly prescriptive National Curriculum may release new energies for change.

In the next section I look at one of the three 'competitive arenas' included in the study to see what light it throws on the central themes of this paper.

5. Examples of strategic choice dilemmas

The examples which follow are drawn from three schools in a local competitive arena to which the PASCI study has given the fictitious name "Northern Heights". It is an area which displays many of the forms of social disadvantage characteristic of parts of urban Britain, with above-average proportions of working-class households, poor quality housing and high

rates of unemployment. There is a small but identifiable ethnic minority community, which is mainly of Bangladeshi origin.

This 'arena' contains three secondary schools, although, as we have pointed out in another paper, "Local competitive arenas are not discrete entities. Their boundaries will tend to overlap and individual family perceptions of the area in which they may choose schools will vary according to such factors as access to transport" (Woods *et al.*, 1994, p. 2). The following brief sketches of the schools (taken from field notes prepared by Carl Bagley) should be read with this caveat in mind.

Braelands School is at the top of the 'league table' of school examination results which the Government publishes annually for this area (and all others), and it is oversubscribed. It is rurally situated in a middle class area at the boundary of Northern Heights. The headteacher and senior managers are committed to maintaining, expanding and promoting the academic nature of the school. It is financially secure and supported by a wealthy and active parent-teacher association.

Newcrest Technology School (which changed its name last year from Newcrest High School after receiving some extra funding from a Government initiative on school technology) is in the lower half of the examination league table and struggles to maintain its planned admission number. It is situated in the urban centre of Northern Heights and serves a multiracial working class population. The headteacher and senior managers fully recognise the competitive environment and are working hard to consolidate and if possible increase the school's market share. The school is financially insecure, and the parent teacher association struggles to raise money.

Leaside School is at the bottom of the examination league table and is undersubscribed by fifty per cent. It is understaffed and has financial difficulties. It is situated at the centre of a large isolated public housing estate and relies for its admissions on the support of parents from its immediate feeder primary schools. The school makes little or no attempt to market and promote itself outside the estate. The headteacher is resigned to the school having a low roll, and sceptical about any strategy being able to increase pupil numbers.

It is possible to identify some dilemmas of strategic choice based on interviews conducted with senior staff of the three schools as part of the PASCI study. However, this is probably not the best source of information on dilemmas since, as Levin (1993) points out, individual respondents tend to rationalize their behaviour and to give events greater coherence retrospectively in relation to goals than they had at the time. We will therefore need to look for other sources of evidence of conflicting pressures on strategic decision making as the study progresses.

Given the relatively fortunate circumstances of Braelands School, it might not be expected to have significant dilemmas of strategic choice. This is indeed

the case, but despite the strong and successful emphasis on academic excellence, uncertainties remain. Parents who have chosen the school are asked to fill in a form giving the reasons for their choice and, somewhat surprisingly, the reasons given most frequently relate to the school's ethos and the child's happiness rather than to examination results. Although the questionnaire only obtains the views of those who have already selected the school (and who may therefore be taking their preference for an academic orientation for granted in their replies), the headteacher feels he must continually strike a balance between the school being too informal on the one hand and being too strict or authoritarian on the other which could alienate some parents.

Newcrest Technology School's dilemmas are more serious. The school has decided to try to raise its academic profile because, in the words of the head teacher, "if we attract less able children our exam results are poor, our position in the league table is poor and we attract less children the next year... It's a downward spiral". A major vehicle for this effort is the association with technology provided by the extra funding obtained from the Government and the change of name. It will be important, at the same time as making this push to attract more of those families who tend towards a 'rational academic' value perspective (Woods, 1994), not to alienate the majority of parents who are currently attracted to the school for 'human warmth' reasons (2). The head also points out: "I can't cut off my remedial support because that is my bread and butter". There are personal as well as institutional aspects to this dilemma. The head regrets the pressure to emphasize academic features at the expense of, for example, extra-curricular activities and school trips, so that:

> "the width of education, the whole balanced person, is suffering. I've always taken the line here that our niche in the market is with confidence, a bit of bottle because we haven't got the academic front. Now we're having because of competition, to market the academic side so much so that the last year staff were pulling kids back in at night time and insisting that they would complete their homework."

It is not clear how successful this strategy will be for Newcrest, given the school's resource deficiencies (such as buildings in a poor state of repair) and the character of the existing pupil intake. For example, it is said that some white middle class parents in the area will never send their children to Newcrest because it is "classed as a black school". Nor is the strategy a response to an expressed need by parents, although the school feels it can sell it to them. As the deputy head said in interview: "We talk to our parents and we convince them that that's what they want... People are malleable".

Cuban used the terms 'dilemma' and 'predicament' interchangeably, but perhaps they should be distinguished. Leaside School seems not so much faced with dilemmas as in a predicament. For example, the school has numerous financial problems, including a sports hall needing repair, which if money could be found to repair it could be hired out to raise extra funds for

the school. Turning round parental preference statistics in situations like this has been compared to 'turning an oil tanker round in an estuary'. Arbon (1993), who drew this analogy, went on to comment that it can be done and is being done in certain instances. (Deem *et al.*, 1993, report the case of a school which even contemplated solving - or avoiding - the problem by moving to a site in a more congenial area).

In the case of Leaside School however the headteacher considers that there is no realistic way that pupil numbers could be significantly increased. No doubt there is a personal dilemma for school managers in such adverse circumstances: whether to choose the path of acceptance, and be thought to display weak leadership, or to take a more optimistic approach and perhaps raise false expectations. Ironically, in spite of its chronic undersubscription, this school has a lifeline: Braelands and Newcrest do not attempt to attract parents from the estate in which Leaside is situated (which has a poor reputation) because they feel it is in their interests to ensure that Leaside stays open, otherwise *they* would receive the kind of pupils that currently go there, which they are keen to avoid.

A competitive climate such as that now existing in many areas of England and Wales creates numerous dilemmas of strategic choice for those guiding the affairs of schools. One of the most sensitive and difficult is what balance to strike between acting separately and acting collaboratively with other schools (Glatter, 1993b; Levacic and Woods, in press), requiring school managers to exercise fine judgement based on educational; political and managerial understanding and a shrewd reading of the local situation - precisely the kinds of 'higher order capacities' identified by Cave and Wilkinson (1992) and discussed earlier in this paper. (For example, in our work we have come across cases in which an apparent agreement between schools not to compete in certain areas has been breached by one of the parties, requiring some form of response by the others). Greater school autonomy and heightened competition produce both sharper challenges and a more ambiguous context: in Cuban's terms, more tightrope walks.

6. Conclusion

Most of the examples presented in the last section suggest that dilemmas can be addressed through 'striking a balance', through attempting to reconcile apparent opposites - what Handy (1994) has referred to as 'managing paradox'. (He quotes Schumacher: "For constructive work, the principal task is always the restoration of some kind of balance" (p. 19)). Elsewhere, I have suggested that "Managing for school effectiveness requires at least three delicate balancing acts. It involves seeking to reconcile:

- the complexity, uncertainty and fluidity of the environment with the unique character and culture of the school as a social institution;
- strategic planning with daily problem-finding and problem-solving;
- creativity with accountability and discipline" (Glatter, 1993a, p. 29)

One merit of such formulations, as suggested earlier, is that they direct attention to some of the key capacities or competences with which preparation or development programmes should be concerned. For example, they provide an important rationale for the use of structured reflective approaches in such programmes (Ostrander and Kottkamp, 1993). Another merit is that, by employing the terminology of balance and reconciliation, they suggest how the indecisiveness associated with the idea of dilemmas may be avoided. At the same time, they emphasize the strengths of the approach: for instance, one study in the business sector suggested that the more creative, dynamic companies tended to be better at recognizing and resolving dilemmas, whereas the less innovative ones tended to over-simplify situations and make sharp choices, often rushing from one extreme of policy or organization to another (Baden-Fuller and Stopford, 1992).

However, they should be treated with caution in at least one respect. Satisfying though these formulations implying the possibility of harmony may be, they are perhaps over-optimistic in paying too little regard to degrees of severity of different dilemma-filled situations. The problems faced by Newcrest Technology School and particularly, by Leaside School in Northern Heights appear much less tractable than those encountered by Braelands School. It is important not to be beguiled by notions of the reconciliation of opposites, nor to allow them to foster, in Cuban's terms, "the mirage of simple solutions".

I hope to have shown in this paper that the study of organizational dilemmas, including how they arise, the ways they are perceived by different actors and varying approaches to their resolution, should receive closer attention in educational administration and management, both in the context of the implementation of structural reform and more generally.

NOTES

1. The Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) study, which is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), reference R000234079, is briefly described in the Appendix.

2. On the basis of the early work on our study, we are hypothesising that a broad distinction can be made between parents who tend towards a 'rational academic' value perspective (attaching importance to academic standards, examination results, etc.), and those who tend towards a 'human warmth' value perspective (placing importance on personal relationships, a caring environment, etc.). Clearly these are not mutually exclusive, nor are they the only ones parents or children bring to bear in choosing a school (see Woods, 1994).

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APPENDIX

Centre for Educational Policy and Management

PASCI
(Parental and School Choice Interaction Study)

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SUMMARY OUTLINE OF THE PASCI STUDY

Major aspects of the Government's education reforms, implemented since the 1988 Education Reform Act, are aimed at creating a climate of heightened competition between schools and enhancing parental choice. Changes include local management of schools under which a school's funding is based largely on the numbers and ages of its pupils, more open enrolment, and the creation of new types of schools such as grant-maintained and city technology colleges.

Whilst previous research has focused on parental choice, the PASCI study is investigating the **interaction** between parental choice of school and school decision-making: in particular, how **secondary schools** respond to competition (including how they obtain, interpret and act upon 'clues' regarding parental preferences, and what factors constrain them in understanding and reacting to such information) and how **parents** react to these responses (including their perception of choice and constraints upon it). The study's findings are aimed at providing insights into the extent to which the new competitive climate is achieving the benefits claimed by its advocates or leading to the problems predicted by its critics.

The **exploratory phase** of the study began in October 1990 and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) until March 1992, then by the Open University's Research Committee. This involved preparing the methodological bases for the main phase and undertaking research in a pilot study area (a town in England).

A further funding award by the ESRC (reference R000234079) is enabling the **main phase** to take place. This began on 1st January 1993 for a three-year period with the aim of undertaking research concurrently in three contrasting case study areas over a three-year period.

During 1993 possible locations for the research were identified and access to three suitable areas and their schools was successfully negotiated. One area is urban (in northern England) displaying many of the deprivations characteristic of parts of metropolitan Britain; one is a town (population about 100,000) with a history of competition amongst schools (both state and private); the third is a semi-rural area where the potential for choice and competition would be expected to be more limited but where there are nevertheless significant parental choice movements into and out of the area. Research activity (using multiple methods of investigation) started in 1993 in each of the case study areas and will continue until 1995.

Each area:

- resembles as closely as possible a 'competitive arena' in which secondary schools draw from a largely common population of parents;

- includes between three and six state secondary schools (plus primary schools from which they draw pupils) at which a series of interviews of staff and governors are being undertaken and competitive responses by the secondary schools monitored - in all, eleven secondary schools are being intensively studied;

- is the location for annual surveys of parents choosing a secondary school, using both self-completion questionnaires and personal interviews - the first of three annual surveys has been undertaken, achieving a response rate approaching 80%.

A national databank of school responses to parental choice and competition has also been initiated. The purpose of this is to gain insight into variations across England and Wales, and to enable case study findings to be placed in a wider context.

Research Team

The study is being carried out by the Open University's Centre for Educational Policy and Management (CEPAM) in the School of Education. The research team consists of:

Professor Ron Glatter	Director of CEPAM and Project Director
Philip Woods	Research Fellow and Principal Investigator
Carl Bagley	Research Fellow
Daphne Johnson	Project Consultant
Bob Morris	Project Consultant

Survey administration and data coding are being undertaken by Glenys Woods

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